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Report of the Secretary-General

1. The present report is submitted in pursuance of General Assembly resolution 41/33 of 5 November 1986, in which the Assembly reaffirmed the principles involved and the action required with regard to the situation relating to Afghanistan.
2. The negotiating process towards the achievement of a comprehensive settlement has reached an advanced stage. Substantial though not sufficiently sustained progress has been made in the past year in the efforts to conclude the international instruments that will comprise the settlement. The past year has also faced the Afghans with the need to begin more actively to examine ways and means to achieve a reunification of the Afghan nation, which will be essential to a prompt and effective implementation of the settlement. The time has undoubtedly come for the Afghans themselves to take the steps required of them in the peace process.
3. The General Assembly will recall that in my previous report (A/41/619-S/18347) I explained that during a round of talks held in July/August 1986, the negotiations centred on two important issues which could not be resolved: the arrangements to ensure effective implementation of the settlement and the time-frame for withdrawal of troops.
4. In order to seek an agreement on these two issues, my Personal Representative, Diego Cordovez, visited the area from 19 November to 3 December 1986. In Islamabad, Mr. Cordovez met with President Zia ul-Haq, Prime Minister Mohammad Khan Junejo and Foreign Minister Sahabzada Yaqub-Khan. In Kabul, Mr. Cordovez met with General Secretary Najib and Foreign Minister Shah Mohammad Dost. Mr. Cordovez also visited Teheran, on 27 November, for the purpose of informing the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran of the state of

the negotiations. In exchanges of views with Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati and with Deputy Foreign Minister Larijani, it was evident that the overriding concern for the Iranian Government remains the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan.

5. On his return to New York, Mr. Cordovez reported to me that, in the course of negotiations in Kabul and Islamabad, it had been possible to reach agreement on an "implementation assistance scheme" designed to ensure that all the obligations deriving from the settlement are strictly fulfilled and that all steps required for the full compliance with such obligations are completed in good faith. The relevant provisions of the draft fourth instrument on interrelationships, incorporating a consultative procedure with the assistance of the Representative of the Secretary-General, were finalized. The operational aspects of the scheme, which will involve the deployment during the period of implementation of United Nations personnel drawn from existing United Nations operations, were set out in a Memorandum of Understanding, which would enter into effect together with the instruments comprising the settlement. In approving the Memorandum the two Governments agreed that the implementation assistance scheme should be executed by the Secretary-General under his authority to provide good offices.

6. In connection with the time-frame for withdrawal, my Personal Representative was informed on a confidential basis of the position of each of the Governments. Mr. Cordovez expressed to both of them the opinion that, on that basis, the convening of a new round of talks could not produce an agreement. The two Governments formally undertook to examine this issue anew with an open mind and urged that a round of talks be convened without delay.

7. A round of talks was therefore held at Geneva from 25 February to 9 March 1987. The Foreign Minister of Pakistan, Sahabzada Yaqub-Khan, and the newly appointed Foreign Minister of Afghanistan, Mr. Abdul Wakil, were present at the Palais des Nations for that purpose. The main item under discussion was the time-frame for withdrawal, although certain other questions, including clarifications of the specific language of sections of the draft instruments, were also discussed. Consequent upon the submission of two new proposals on the time-frame by each of the Governments the gap between their positions - which initially was 45 months - was reduced to 11 months. At a subsequent round of talks, held at Geneva from 7 to 10 September 1987, there was a further narrowing - but not, regrettably, a closing - of the gap.

8. The discussion concerning the time-frame has made it abundantly clear that this issue has enormous political and other implications for both interlocutors. Both Governments have so far sought to bridge their differences on the basis of a system of negotiation which served them well at the beginning of the March round. At this juncture, however, it is indispensable that innovative diplomatic approaches should be utilized when this matter is taken up again. It must by now be all too evident to the two Governments that early agreement on a short time-frame for the withdrawal of troops would give decisive impetus to the Afghans' own efforts towards reconciliation.

9. The Governments of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the United States of America, which are the two designated guarantors, have been kept informed of developments by my Personal Representative on a regular basis. On 29 June 1987, during an official visit to Moscow, I myself met with General Secretary Mikhail S. Gorbachev, who expressed his strong support for the United Nations diplomatic process and assured me that the main concern of the Soviet Union was that Afghanistan should have a neutral and independent régime, not hostile to the Soviet Union nor indeed to any of its neighbours. The General Secretary expressed the expectation that a settlement would be concluded as soon as possible.

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10. I have stressed in the past that a negotiated settlement is the only possible way to achieve peace in Afghanistan because the degree of national reconciliation that such a settlement must entail, to allow the Afghan people to decide their own future, could not be achieved by military means. In 1986, I emphasized in my report to the General Assembly that bold and decisive steps of national reconciliation would be needed to ensure that the settlement commands the support of all segments of the Afghan people.

11. It is gratifying to note, therefore, that during the period covered by this report all Afghans, both inside and outside their homeland, have become manifestly concerned about the need to begin a process designed to reaffirm their right to self-determination - which is one of the principal objectives of the settlement. What the Afghans have not so far set in motion is a widely acceptable mechanism for dialogue and decision-making which would enable them to work out the kind of arrangements that may be required for a smooth implementation of the settlement and, looking beyond its conclusion and entry into force, to identify the constitutional processes and the policies that they might deem appropriate to ensure continued peaceful conditions in Afghanistan and in the region. My Personal Representative is, of course, ready to facilitate communication, and thus assist the Afghans in these crucial endeavours, but I wish to underline in particular the role that all the Governments in a position to do so should play in broadening the opportunities for the Afghan people to chart their own destiny.
